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A suggestion on the field study of ferns

PHILIP DOWELL

At least in America, the fern student need not as yet resort to the mere naming and describing of forms, even though he may profitably study forms or variants and write about them. It is well for the botanist to become so thoroughly acquainted with species of plants that he can readily recognize certain forms or variations, but it is not necessary nor even desirable that he give a scientific name to each of the multitudinous forms he learns to recognize.

The suggestion of another field of activity will be sufficient to attract the attention and the efforts of many students who are favorably situated for carrying on the work. I have in mind especially the time of fruiting of each species. Records should be definite, giving at least the actual date when the spores first ripen, also as nearly as practicable the time when the spores have been all discharged. In connection with this study, the student may be in a position to make various other observations and records: such as the time of appearance of the plant at the beginning of the growing season and the time of its withering at the end of the season, behavior under varying ecological conditions, distribution of species, etc. Such records from different observers in various sections of the country constitute valuable material for publication, especially if the records extend over observation periods of more than one season for the same species.*

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* Further suggestions may occur to the reader by reference to H. W. Pretz's *Flora of Lehigh County, Pennsylvania*—I. Bull. Torrey Club 38: 45-78. 7 Mr 1911.